

March 23, 2016

To: Ken McDonald
For the Instructional Quality Commission
California Department of Education

From: Ross E. Dunn
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Subject: Comments and Recommended Edits for the Framework for History – Social Science

On November 18, 2015, I submitted to the IQC a version of this letter with accompanying attachments of recommended content description chapter edits. I should have resubmitted these documents between December 17, 2015 and February 29, 2016. I have been assured, however, that the Board of Education will take my current submission into consideration before it completes its work on the revised History – Social Science Framework

I would like to make a number of comments about two elements of the draft Framework. I have also attached a copy of Chapter 10 of the Framework in which I have made specific recommendations for changes, mainly for regarding historical questions that have been inserted into the grade 6 course descriptions.

I should mention that in 2009 Nancy McTygue asked me to serve on a committee to review and revise the Framework course descriptions, including development of essays for grades 6, 7, and 10 titled “Global Overview.” In the past two years I have also reviewed and commented on the world history course descriptions again, and I drafted the text of the current Appendix A: Problems, Questions, and Themes in the History and Geography Classroom.

1. Historical questions inserted into Framework course descriptions.

I have strongly supported the idea of embedding analytical questions in the course descriptions. Historical studies in California schools should be founded, not simply on “coverage” of particular countries, civilizations, or topics but on the posing of concrete analytical questions, including topically broad ones. These questions should in every case serve as gateways to classroom investigations and discussion. They should address issues of historical cause, consequence, significance, comparison, and patterns of change on scales from the local to the global. My great concern is that the questions inserted in the course descriptions do not on the whole accomplish this purpose, that is, the commitment the Framework makes repeatedly to development of historical thinking skills. All questions in the Framework, or so it seems to me, should support the development of students’ critical skills. All questions should be designed to encourage lively engagement in learning. The draft Framework acknowledges the goals of both the Common Core and the *C-3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards*. The questions currently in the draft Framework, however, only rarely address the skills set forth in those two publications.

I have closely examined the questions in grade 6 world history and attached suggested edits in this chapter. But I have also reviewed the questions in the grade 7 and grade 10 world history descriptions and read through the questions in the United States history descriptions. Questions in all these grades tend to be highly generalized descriptive (rather than analytical) interrogatives aimed, or so it appears, to indicate material that students ought to "cover" in the Framework units. The great majority of the questions have little classroom utility as specific analytical prompts for student thought and activity. Most of them are either over-generalized, indeterminate, vague in meaning, or sprawling and unmanageable in the subject matter they address. All the questions should, on the contrary, invite students to query specific issues of causation, consequence, and significance and to interrogate and analyze historical evidence. Very few of the hundreds of questions model for teachers exemplary analytical approaches or serve well as starting points for specific inquiry.

Take the example of a question in grade 6: "How did people live by the gathering and hunting way of life?" Like so many, this question is overgeneralized and vague, offering teachers and students no clarity regarding a *historical problem* to be addressed. The question is also circular ("How did people live by their way of life?"), rendering it illogical. A student would likely give an answer to this question that would terminate rather than stimulate discussion ("They gathered and they hunted.") In my marginal comments I suggest: "Why did the foraging and hunting way of life require that people live in small social groups and cooperate on a basis of social equality?" This question requires that students contemplate a concrete historical problem regarding cause and consequence and invites them consider evidence in developing their answers. All the questions in the Framework course descriptions should encourage critical analysis in one way or another rather than simply ask for descriptions of phenomena.

Another example from grade 6 is this question in the section on China: "How did the philosophical system of Confucianism support individuals, rulers, and societies? The phrase "support individuals, rulers, and societies" crams three different broad social or political categories into this one question. Thus, the question is really a sort of "outcome" requirement, a statement of what students should "cover" in studying ancient China. Outcome prescriptions are a useful curricular element, but that is not what the numerous questions in the course descriptions of all grades are intended to be. As a launching pad for classroom research and discussion this question has no concrete value. The question would have to be broken down into several parts, each of which would address one or more critical skills. The language of the question itself would have to be critically examined, especially the assumption embedded in it that Confucianism always "supported" individuals, rulers, and societies. Confucianism also "challenged" rulers, and it supported "individuals" only in so far as they humbly accepted the dominant social order. I believe that the IQC and the State Board are missing a huge opportunity to model for teachers good examples of questions that tax student's critical faculties and that may serve as foundations for class activities.

I am attaching the November 20, 2015 text of the course description for grade 6 (Chapter 10). Using MS Word tracking I have suggested a number of specific edits, most of them, though not all, addressing the historical questions in the draft. I have introduced revisions of nearly all of these questions. My intention is to offer the IQC and the State Board a model for formulating questions for all history grade levels in a more effective manner and in conformity with the spirit

of Common Core and the C3 Framework. I believe that a small group of teachers, historians, and experts on critical skill development could rewrite the questions that need to be rewritten for all grades in a relatively short time.

2. Global Overview Statements

In 2009, a group of teachers and scholars, including myself, brought together under the leadership of Nancy McTigue undertook to write a first-round revision of the world history course descriptions in the 2005 Framework edition. This group proposed that the descriptions of the three world history courses begin with a Global Overview section. Both CDOE officers and the IQC History – Social Science subject committee thought this was a good idea, so our group proceeded to develop it. The fundamental concept was to offer teachers and students ways to link content in the set of course descriptions for each grade level to larger-scale regional, hemispheric, or global patterns of historical change. Research in both the United States and Britain has shown that exposing students not only to local, national or civilization studies but also to “big pictures” of the world’s past, for example, effects of global environmental change beginning in ancient times, enhances historical learning. The working group believed, therefore, that many teachers would welcome opportunities to relate developments in particular times and places to larger patterns of change, much as students learn spatial geography by studying maps from local to global scales.

The November 20, 2015 version of the Framework has retained the Global Overview for grade six but has seriously truncated it for grades 7 and 10, moving some of the language in it to particular course description modules. One problem with this decision is that the logic of including the Global Overview in grade 6 but only much abbreviated forms of it in grades 7 and 10 is never made clear. An odd asymmetry in the three world history courses is thus introduced. Of greater concern to me is the decision to deprive teachers of the complete set of three Global Overviews and therefore opportunities to challenge students to think about history at different scales of time and place and to recognize that no scale is *better* than another but that students see *different historical patterns* at different scales. For example, the origins Industrial Revolution requires *both* a focus on England and the world context of trade, empire, slavery, and so on. I know it is late in the game to restore the Global Overviews in their full richness to grades 7 and 10, but the board would find will participants in accomplishing this revision at little cost.

Sincerely,

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